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Subject: Draft 2006-2008 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Comment

From: Dan Aldrich <daldrich@mtaonline.net>

Date: Wed, 30 Nov 2005 12:35:29 -0900

To: DOT_STIP@dot.state.ak.us

CC: Vic Kohring <Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us>, Lyda Green <Senator_Lyda_Green@legis.state.ak.us>, Mary Kvalheim <marykv@mtaonline.net>

Commissioner Barton,

The project scope listed for the Seward Meridian Road Improvement Project (Need ID 2481) is incorrect. Planning documents, including the Draft 2006-2008 STIP and the Draft Mat-Su Long Range Transportation Plan, continue to portray this project as providing a 4-lane expansion of the existing roadway and a 2-lane extension between Bogard Road and Seldon Road. The latest DOT/PF proposal, presumably outlined in the EA being considered by FHWA, shows a 5-lane highway with an adjacent bike trail for the entire length of the project.

The inclusion of center turn lanes and bike trails in other project descriptions is evidence that the project scope shown for this project is incorrect. This inaccuracy leads to misinformation and confusion on the part of the public. The project scope used in the various planning documents would fit within the existing ROW, eliminating the need to displace current residents to improve traffic flow. It would also reduce the funding necessary for this project. The STIP should be revised either to indicate the true scope of this project or to reduce the proposed funding to the level needed for the smaller scope.

The STIP proposes to spend \$6.5M on securing the ROW for this project in 2007, but does not propose to begin construction until some undetermined future date, at least three years later. This project has already been delayed from 2006 to 2008 (ref: 2004-2006 STIP), and it now appears will be delayed even further. With the other projects proposed for construction during 2006-2008 (Bogard Road Extension, Seldon Road Extension, Crusey Street Improvements, Trunk Road Rehabilitation, Point MacKenzie Road/Burma Road, Knik Arm Bridge, etc.) and the growing pressure to upgrade Palmer-Wasilla Highway and develop a southern bypass route around Wasilla, it seems pretty clear that completing the Seward Meridian Road Improvements Project is moving well down the list of priorities.

Federal guidelines stipulate that advance ROW acquisition is only allowable in the case of financial hardship on the part of the property owner (when specifically requested by the property owner) or anticipated increase in the cost related to expected development of undeveloped parcels, for any project that uses federal funds. The proposed acquisition of property for the ROW in 2007 will dispossess residential property owners at the south end of Seward Meridian Road, some of whom are on fixed incomes and/or disabled, with no realistic expectation that the project will be completed. This violates the intent of the federal guidelines.

These inconsistencies should be corrected before the Draft 2006-2008 STIP is submitted for approval. If the scope of this project shown in the draft document is correct, the funding levels should be verified to insure that the project is not over-budgeted. If the scope shown in the document is wrong it should be corrected. In either case, if construction will not begin until 2010 or later, any ROW acquisition of currently developed properties required for this project should be delayed to more closely correspond with actual construction timelines and the funding projection adjusted accordingly.

Sincerely,

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